

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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FM AMEMBASSY CAPE TOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3724

INFO AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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AMEMBASSY MBABANE

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

T

GS: PINT, SF

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION IN DISARRAY ON EVE OF ELECTIONS

SUMMARY: AS SOUTH AFRICA'S PARLIAMENT BEGAN 1974 SESSION TODAY, OPPOSITION UNITED PARTY (UP) ONCE AGAIN IN DISARRAY AND IN POOR POSITION TO FUNCTION EFFECTIVELY IN PARLIAMENT. MOREOVER, UP'S INTERNAL SQUABBLING DIMINISHES FURTHER ITS ALREADY UNLIKELY CHANCE OF ADDING TO ITS PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION AT NEXT GENERAL ELECTION, WHICH EXPECTED TO TAKE PLACE IN APRIL OR MAY. END SUMMARY.

1. STATE PRESIDENT FOUCHE OFFICIALLY OPENED 1974 PARLIAMENT THIS MORNING. ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT'S SPEECH OF SOME INTEREST (8SEPTEL), OPENING OF SESSION LARGELY A CEREMONIAL OCCASION

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AND REAL ACTION WILL NOT BEGIN UNTIL MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4,

WHEN BUSINESS OF PARLIAMENT BEGINS WITH NO CONFIDENCE DEBATE.

2. LEADER OF OPPOSITION SIR DE VILLIERS GRAAFF WILL LEAD OFF WITH SPEECH ATTACKING NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES. HOWEVER, PACKED GALLERIES OF PARLIAMENT WILL BE SAVING THEIR FULLEST ATTENTION FOR EXPECTED REPLY BY PRIME MINISTER VORSTER. NOT ONLY IS IT ANTICIPATED HE WILL ANNOUNCE DATE OF EARLY GENERAL ELECTION, BUT ALSO UNITED PARTY HAS GIVEN HIM FULL OPPORTUNITY TO DEFLECT GRAAFF'S ATTACK AND MAKE A SHAMBLES OF UP'S ATTEMPT TO PUT GOVERNMENT ON DEFENSIVE.

3. THROUGHOUT PAST YEAR UP HAS SUFFERED FROM INTERNAL STRESSES BORN OF CONFLICT BETWEEN ITS LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE WINGS. GRAAFF HAS SKILLFULLY PAPERED OVER THESE TROUBLES, MOST RECENTLY ONLY A WEEK AGO (CAPE TOWN 0054). BUT ONCE AGAIN, AND OF ALL TIMES ON EVE OF GENERAL ELECTIONS, FISSIPAROUS TENDENCY OF UP HAS MANIFESTED ITSELF AND PARTY IS IN SERIOUS DISARRAY. A FAÇADE OF UNITY WILL NO DOUBT BE ERECTED, BUT SERIOUS DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE TO UP'S ALREADY WEAKENED ABILITY TO FUNCTION AS EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION IN PARLIAMENT, AND EVEN MORE PERHAPS TO ITS POWER TO ATTRACT VOTES AWAY FROM EITHER VORSTER'S NATIONAL PARTY (NP) OR THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY.

4. LATEST ISSUES BEDEVILLING UP ARE HARRY SCHWARZ' UNAUTHORIZED FORAY INTO NATAL AND SIGNING OF DECLARATION OF FAITH WITH CHIEF GATSHA BUTHELEZI (PRETORIA 0092) AND CONTROVERSY OVER NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES FOR PARLIAMENTARY SEATS IN SEVERAL CAPE CONSTITUENCIES. AFTER DELIBERATING FOR OVER TWO DAYS, UP'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS UNANIMOUSLY ENDORSED A RESOLUTION JANUARY 31 UPHOLDING GRAAFF'S PREVIOUS REPRIMAND OF SCHWARZ. SINCE THIS ACTION APPROVED BY SOME INDIVIDUALS SYMPATHETIC TO SCHWARZ, AS WELL AS BY THOSE WHO INTENSELY DISLIKE HIM, REPRIMAND SEEN AS A COMPROMISE FALLING FAR SHORT OF WHAT HIS ENEMIES MIGHT HAVE WISHED BUT ENOUGH TO PLACATE THEIR ANGER.

5. STILL UNRESOLVED IS FIGHT OVER NOMINATIONS. UP'S CAPE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PROVINCIAL CANDIDATE'S COMMITTEE, DOMINATED BY CONSERVATIVES, HAD IN FOUR CASES OVERRIDDEN DIVISIONAL NOMINATING COMMITTEES' DECISIONS TO NOMINATE LIBERAL CANDIDATES. ENSUING CONTROVERSY HAS INCLUDED POSSIBILITY OF MASS RESIGNATIONS AT DIVISIONAL LEVEL IN TWO CONSTITUENCIES (WYNBERG AND GARDENS) AND ADDED TO UP'S ALREADY WEAK POSITION IN FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. IT LIKELY, THOUGH, THAT GRAAFF CAN EFFECT SOME SORT OF COMPROMISE.

6. COMPROMISES NOTWITHSTANDING, UP'S UNITY IS FRAGILE AND ITS INTERNAL DIFFERENCES HAVE BEEN REPEATEDLY AND THOROUGHLY PARADED FOR ALL TO SEE. AS A RESULT, PRIME MINISTER AND HIS PARTY ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS SESSION OF PARLIAMENT, AND PROBABLY TO ELECTIONS, WITH UNDISGUISED GLEE. VORSTER HAS EXPRESSED PRIVATELY HIS GREAT PLEASURE AT THE OPPOSITIONS FUMBLINGS AND DISCOMFITURE.

7. ON THE OTHER HAND, UP SUPPORTERS ARE GLOOMY. JOHANNESBURG STAR HAS EDITORIALIZED THAT IF UP ESTABLISHMENT "PUT THEM-SELVES AND ALL THEIR OWN NOMINEES UP FOR ELECTION, TO THE EXCLUSION OF DYNAMIC NEW BLOOD," IT WILL NOT BE WORTHWHILE TO VOTE IN GENERAL ELECTION. IN ITS LATEST EDITION, FINANCIAL MAIL STATED THAT NATIONAL PARTY "WILL SOON BE LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE POLLS--ASSUMING THEIR CANDIDATES DON'T DIE OF HYSTERIA WHEN THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION RISES TO PRESENT HIS MOTION OF NO CONFIDENCE." FINANCIAL MAIL ADDED THAT WHAT IS NEEDED IS CHANGE OF UP'S LEADERSHIP.

8. UP'S DIFFICULTIES WILL NOT MAKE ALL THAT MUCH DIFFERENCE IN OUTCOME OF GENERAL ELECTION. NP IN ANY EVENT WAS EXPECTED RETAIN MOST OF ITS CURRENT HEAVY MAJORITY OR EVEN SLIGHTLY IMPROVE ON IT. NP'S STRENGTH IN AFRIKANERDOM AND BLOW DEALT TO UP BY RECENT CONSTITUENCY DELIMITATION HAVE ENSURED THIS. HOWEVER, A TRULY UNITED UP WHOSE PERFORMANCE COULD HAVE GIVEN CONFIDENCE TO ITS SUPPORTERS AND ATTRACTED SOME VOTES FROM NP AND PROGRESSIVE CAMPS MIGHT HAVE MADE A STRONGER SHOWING AND PERHAPS PICKED UP SOME MARGINAL SEATS. THIS NOW APPEARS MOST UNLIKELY.

SMITH

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